

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SIL-01 LAB-06 EB-11 COME-00 SCEM-02

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5545

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH PRIME MINISTER'S RADIO INTERVIEW: MESSMER TAKES THE
OFFENSIVE.

POUCHED: BORDEAUX, LYON, MARSEILLE, MARTINIQUE, NICE, STRASBOURG

REF: PARIS 32317

1. PRIME MINISTER MESSMER WAS INTERVIEWED ON SEMI-OFFICIAL
EUROPE NO. 1 RADIO STATION DECEMBER 17. MESSMER RESPONDED
ENERGETICALLY, OCCASIONALLY PUGNACIOUSLY, TO A SERIES OF QUESTIONS
DEVOTED MOSTLY TO ECONOMIC AND LABOR MATTERS, THE PETROLEUM
CRISIS AND THE RECENT TELEPHONE TAPPING AFFAIR. ON ECONOMIC
MATTERS, MESSMER SAID THAT MEASURED FRENCH APPROACH TO
CONTROLLING INFLATION HAD BEEN MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN THE HASTY
MEASURES WHICH HAD BEEN TAKEN BY SOME EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.
INFLATION, THOUGH BAD, WAS LESS IMPORTANT AND LESS SERIOUS THAN
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UNEMPLOYMENT, SUCH AS RESULTS FROM

MEASURES TAKEN IN GERMANY. MESSMER SAID THAT FRANCE WOULD HAVE SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF PETROLEUM FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS. HE DID NOT WISH TO MAKE LONG-TERM PREDICTIONS. THE FUEL CONSERVATION MEASURES TAKEN BY THE GOF WERE DESIGNED AS PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES AND ALSO TO ENABLE FRANCE TO ECONOMIZE AT A TIME OF RISING OIL PRICES. THERE WAS NO PETROLEUM CRISIS IN VIEW.

2. ASKED ABOUT TELEPHONE TAPPING AND BUGING, ESPECIALLY WITH REFERENCE TO THE CANARD ENCHAFNE AFFAIR, MESSMER STATED CATEGORICALLY THAT NO POLITICIAN OR JOURNALIST HAD HIS TELEPHONE TAPPED, THAT THE TOTAL NUMBER OF INSTALLATIONS WAS LESS THAN 500 (LESS THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE 1946), THAT ONLY FOREIGN AGENTS AND CRIMINALS WERE TAPPED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW, AND THAT ALL INSTALLATIONS WERE UNDER THE PRIME MINISTER'S CONTROL. AS TO THE CANARD AFFAIR ITSELF, MESSMER SAID MERELY THAT IT WAS "BIZARRE*? EXTREMELY BIZARRE." ASKED ABOUT A POSSIBLE MINISTERIAL SHAKEUP, MESSMER SAID THAT AS PRIME MINISTER THIS WAS HIS OWN BUSINESS AND HE HAD NOTHING TO SAY AT THIS TIME. HE WOULD REMAIN AT HIS POST FOR AS LONG AS HE ENJOYED THE CONFIDENCE OF PRESIDENT POMPIDOU AND HAD NOT BEEN CENSURED BY THE ASSEMBLY. HE LEFT THE STRONG IMPRESSION THAT POMPIDOU WOULD RESTATE HIS CONFIDENCE IN HIM IN THE PRESIDENT'S PRE-CHRISTMAS NATIONAL RADIO-TV ADDRESS DECEMBER 20.

3. COMMENT. MESSMER SOUNDED CONFIDENT AND COMBATIVE. HE TRIED TO PAINT A PICTURE OF AN ALERT, STEADY, ACTIVE GOVERNMENT ON TOP OF ITS PROBLEMS. HE ONCE AGAIN STATED HIS APPROACH TO THE INCUMBENCE OF HIS OFFICE, THAT IS, THAT THE PRIME MINISTER SERVED AT THE PRESIDENT'S PLEASURE. MESSMER'S INTERVIEW CAME IN RESPONSE TO A SPATE OF LEAD ITEMS IN THE WEEKLY PRESS THAT HE RESIGN OVER THE CANARD AFFAIR AND BECAUSE OF THE GENERALLY MEDIOCRE PERFORMANCE OF THE GOF IN RECENT MONTHS (REFTEL). POMPIDOU, HOWEVER DISSATISFIED HE MAY BE WITH GOF PERFORMANCE, IS CERTAINLY NOT A MAN TO GIVE IN TO PRESSURE FROM THE MEDIA FOR GOVERNMENTAL CHANGES. THIS FACTOR, COMBINED WITH MESSMER'S PERFORMANCE LAST NIGHT, HAS PROBABLY SERVED TO STRENGTHEN THE PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION.

DECONTROLLED 1/31/75

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